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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: AL JAZEERA NETWORK BOARD OF DIRECTORS NAMED

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1. (SBU) In an effort to maintain brand identity and consistency of message and quality, the GOQ established in late 2005 (reftel) an entity known as the Al Jazeera Network (AJN), charged with overseeing all bodies bearing the Al Jazeera brand name. On March 1, an Amiri decree announced the establishment of the AJN board of directors. The Board includes present Al Jazeera Arabic Managing Director Wadah Khanfar. The key position of AJN Managing Director, which will wield significant operational authority and influence over the brand's editorial policy, has yet to be filled.

2. (SBU) According to press statements, the seven-member board will include:

-- Shk. Hamad Bin Thamer Al Thani, Chairman. Hamad bin Thamer is currently the chairman of the Al Jazeera board, as well as of the Qatar TV & Radio Corporation.

-- Khalaf Ahmed Al Manni, Vice Chairman - long-time number two of Hamad bin Thamer.

-- Ahmed Abdallah Al Kholaiifi.

-- Abdallah Mubarak Al Kholaiifi- Currently Director of Human Resources at Qatar TV.

-- Dr. Elham Bader Al Sada, a respected academic, currently a presenter at Qatar TV & Radio Corporation. A popular as well as somewhat controversial Qatari personality, she hosts a lively morning show on Qatari national radio that sometimes takes a critical stance on domestic issues, including nationality and sponsorship laws. A Qatari citizen, she is married to a Jordanian and her mother is of Palestinian origin.

-- Mahmoud Shammam, Washington Bureau Chief of Newsweek in Arabic. An American citizen of Libyan descent, Shammam lives in Washington and is known to be close to the Amir, Sheikha Mozah and to key officials at the Amiri Diwan in Doha. Known for his liberal and anti-Islamist views, as well as for his criticism of Al Jazeera and its editorial policy, Shammam is also prominent among Libyan opposition figures.

-- Wadah Khanfar. Currently Managing Director of Al Jazeera Arabic satellite channel. Rumor has it that Khanfar is angling for the job of AJN Managing Director.

3. (SBU) The AJN Board will oversee all of Al Jazeera's numerous offshoots. These - now representing a veritable media empire - include:

-- Al Jazeera Arabic, est. 1996

-- Al Jazeera International, to be launched May 2006.

-- Al Jazeera Arabic website (currently under AJ editorial control).

-- Al Jazeera English website (currently under AJI editorial control).

-- Al Jazeera Mubashir: Est. 2005. Live conferences, meetings, discussions, comparable C-span, no anchors, no editing process.

-- Al Jazeera Sports, est. 2003. 24/7 sports news channel.

-- Al Jazeera Children's Channel - est. 2005, targets Arabic-speaking children aged 3-15; billed as "edutainment"

-- Al Jazeera Documentary - to be launched 2006. 24-hour Arabic programming, comparable to the Discovery Channel.

-- Al Jazeera Training Center - est. Feb 2004, providing training to AJ and regional journalists; eyeing a regional role in media reform efforts.

-- Al Jazeera Center for Studies - Doha-based think tank, est. 2005; designed to provide an academic Arab perspective on socio-political-economic issues affecting the region.

-- Al Jazeera Mobile, bilingual, SMS-based breaking news service.

4. (SBU) The next step will be to name the managing director of the Al Jazeera Network, a key operational position that will wield considerable influence and play a key role in shaping editorial policy across the Arabic and English TV

channels and websites, as well as in resolving the considerable tension currently existing between the Arabic and English channels.

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